

FINAL REPORT OF THE
CHALMETTE BATTLEFIELD TASK FORCE
TO THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
FOR RECOMMENDED IMPROVEMENTS AT THE CHALMETTE UNIT OF
JEAN LAFITTE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK AND PRESERVE
CHALMETTE, LOUISIANA

AUGUST 23, 2004

INTRODUCTION

Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve Advisory Commission was established August 23, 2002, by Public Law 92-589 to provide for free exchanges of ideas between the National Park Service and the public to facilitate the solicitation of advice or other counsel from members of the public for suggested improvements to the Chalmette Battlefield site within Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve. In August, 2002, twelve members of the committee were appointed by the Secretary of the Department of the Interior for terms until August 23, 2004. The duties and responsibilities of the Task Force are solely advisory.

Task Force members, along with their organizations are as follows:

1. Superintendent Geraldine Smith, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve
2. Ms. Elizabeth McDougall, LCTP, Director of Tourism, St. Bernard Parish
3. Ms. Faith Moran, Assistant Principal, St. Bernard Parish
4. Mr. Anthony A. Fernandez, Jr., Attorney at Law, St. Bernard Parish Sheriff's Office
5. Mr. Drew Heaphy, CPA, St. Bernard Port
6. Mr. Paul Perez, CFP, Chamber of Commerce
7. Mrs. George W. Davis, United States Daughters of 1812
8. Mr. Eric Cager, Representing Fazendeville
9. Captain Bonnie Pepper Cook, St. Bernard Historical Society
10. Mr. Alvin W. Guillot, Lake Borgne Basin Levee District
11. Mr. Michael L. Fraering, Port Hudson State Historic Site
12. Col. John F. Pugh, Jr., Louisiana Army National Guard

This is the final report of the Chalmette Battlefield Task Force. Contained in this report is an analysis of the Chalmette Battlefield and the Chalmette National Cemetery with recommendations to the National Park Service for improvements to these two facilities.

SCOPE OF RESPONSIBILITY

The Task Force was needed to advise the National Park Service on recommendations for suggested improvements to the Chalmette Battlefield site within Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve. The Task Force will review the condition of only federally-owned buildings and artifacts within the boundary of the Chalmette National Cemetery and Chalmette Battlefield units of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve. Recommendations of the Task Force should address non-Federal cost sharing. The Task Force recommendations will be analyzed and a plan of action developed.

The Task Force is subject to the provisions of the Federal Advisory Committee Act and shall take no action. The Task Force will take two years to complete its work, ending August 23, 2004, and will terminate once the National Park Service has made a final decision.

The goal and objective of the Task Force is to analyze all aspects of the Chalmette National Battlefield and the Chalmette National Cemetery. After the analysis specific recommendations will be given to the National Park Service.

BACKGROUND

Task Force members, along with their organizations and who they represent, are as follows:

1. Ms. Geraldine Smith, Superintendent
Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve
Representing Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve
2. Ms. Elizabeth McDougall, LCTP, Chairman of the Task Force
Director of Tourism, St. Bernard Parish
Representing the St. Bernard Parish Government and the Tourism Industry
3. Ms. Faith Moran
Assistant Principal, Lacoste Elementary
Member of the Board of Zoning Adjustments
Representing St. Bernard Parish Council
4. Mr. Anthony A. Fernandez, Jr., Attorney at Law
St. Bernard Parish Sheriff's Office
Representing the St. Bernard Parish Council

5. Mr. Drew Heaphy, CPA
Director of Administration and Planning Services
St. Bernard Port, Harbor and Terminal District
Representing St. Bernard Port and Harbor Terminal
6. Mr. Paul Perez, CFP
Board member of the St. Bernard Chamber of Commerce
Representing the St. Bernard Chamber of Commerce
7. Mrs. George W. Davis
Honorary Vice President, National Society of the Daughters of 1812
Representing the Louisiana Society of United States Daughters of 1812
8. Mr. Eric Cager
New Orleans, Louisiana
Representing the Fazendeville Descendants
9. Captain Bonnie Pepper Cook, Vice-Chairman of the Task Force
St. Bernard Parish Sheriff's Office
Representing the St. Bernard Historical Society
10. Mr. Alvin W. Guillot
Arabi, Louisiana
Representing the Lake Borgne Basin Levee District
11. Mr. Michael L. Fraering
Port Hudson State Historic Site
Zachary, Louisiana
Representing Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office
12. Col. John F. Pugh, Jr.
Director of Human Resources, Jackson Barracks
New Orleans, Louisiana
Representing the Jackson Barracks unit of the Louisiana Army National Guard

At the first meeting of the Task Force, Superintendent Geraldine Smith introduced Mr. Rich Sussman, Chief, Planning and Compliance Division, attending as acting Federal Officer for Patricia Hooks, Acting Regional Director, Southeast Region. At the January 29, 2003 meeting, Mr. David Muth introduced Mr. Tim Bermisderfer as the currently assigned Federal Designated Officer. Mr. Bemisderfer is a Landscape Architect in the Planning and Compliance Division, National Park Service, Southeast Regional Office-

Atlanta. Ms. Dee Landry will serve as Administrative Assistant for Resource Management.

At the January 29, 2003 meeting Mr. David Muth presented slides and an overview of past and present conditions of the Chalmette Battleground and National Cemetery. The Task Force members as well had concerns regarding the condition of the park and cemetery. There was a general discussion of ideas for possible improvements that could be made to the park and cemetery. A subcommittee was formed of Task Force members who were asked to list and express their personal concerns. Task Force members were encouraged to solicit ideas and opinions from the general public. These concerns were listed and given in a report to the general Task Force membership at the March 26, 2003 meeting. The Task Force continued to meet regularly through August 2004 to identify items of concern and potential recommendations to include in the Final Report.

ISSUES OF CONCERN

CONCERN 1:

The Chalmette National Battlefield and the Chalmette National Cemetery are lacking a visitor-friendly atmosphere. It was stated in earlier discussions that the purpose of the park was merely to accurately interpret the historic significance of the January, 1815 Battle.

CONCERN 2:

The grounds were in much need of maintenance and care. Upon visual inspection, regular maintenance and systemic grooming seem to be lacking. Cemetery tombs need attending. Weeds are growing out of the Chalmette obelisk, and the wall around the cemetery needs repair.

CONCERN 3:

Proper signage and landscaping is needed to call attention to the significance of the National Park and Cemetery. It is easy to drive past not realizing the park is there.

CONCERN 4:

The Malus-Beauregard House, constructed in 1834, should be restored, interpreted, and utilized for various events.

CONCERN 5:

Information concerning the entire story of the Battle of New Orleans should be available to the public. There is nothing to see except the monument and the Malus-Beauregard House, which is empty and deteriorating.

CONCERN 6:

This Task Force Committee should continue as an on-going Committee to maintain communication between the park and the community. In this way community needs and concerns could be addressed on a regular basis. In the absence of this Task Force or similar on-going committee, community needs and concerns may not be addressed on a regular basis.

CONCERN 7:

Cooperation between volunteer groups and the park is not evident. The park should be open to meet the needs of volunteer groups who want to enhance the living history of the park.

CONCERN 8:

Transportation to and from downtown New Orleans should be implemented.

CONCERN 9:

Arrangements should be made for the park to be used after 5:00 P.M.

CONCERN 10:

The Chalmette National Battlefield and the Chalmette National Cemetery should stand alone, separated from the Jean Lafitte National Park and Preserve system.

CONCERN 11:

Erosion of Coastal Louisiana threatens sites of national historic treasures such as the Chalmette Battlefield and the Chalmette National Cemetery, that we seek to preserve.

RECOMMENDATIONS THAT ADDRESS ISSUES OF CONCERN

RECOMMENDATIONS THAT ADDRESS CONCERN 1:

- A. Sign-in sheets vs. comment sheets should be available. Valuable marketing information including where people are visiting from and how they heard of the battlefield could be analyzed and used to promote the park.
- B. Tourists could be provided with information about the local area and its attractions.

- C. Install an elevated river-front overview in the area of the Mallus-Beauregard house for visitors to appreciate the important role the Mississippi River played in the Battle of New Orleans.
- D. We would support the placement of commemorative markers around the base of the monument to acknowledge the participation of all militia/troops engaged on the American side of the Battle of New Orleans.
- E. Park benches could be placed around the park where visitors can rest
- F. Work with the Committee regarding the availability of the Battlefield site for events and meetings.
- G. The visitor center should be enlarged or relocated to provide more space for improved interpretation and other historical activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS THAT ADDRESS CONCERN 2:

- A. Chalmette needs improved maintenance on a continuous basis to maintain the grounds properly. Having a regular maintenance crew who can concentrate on just the Chalmette Park would alleviate a lot of these concerns.
- B. The historic trees need maintaining; the grass needs cutting properly; cemetery headstones need straightening, cleaning, and better manicuring.
- C. The wall around the cemetery needs repair.
- D. A plan for better drainage should be developed.
- E. The Task Force would support the implementation of the recommendations of the Cemetery Assessment Report.

RECOMMENDATIONS THAT ADDRESS CONCERN 3:

- A. Change or enhance the sign at the front of the park; perhaps, put an additional sign on the median in front of or across from the entrance to the battlefield.
- B. Eliminate some vegetation in order to open a view of the battlefield from St. Bernard Highway.

C. Consider lighting the monument.

RECOMMENDATIONS THAT ADDRESS CONCERN 4:

- A. The Malus-Beauregard House could be used as an interpretive site for the other events associated with the cultural landscape and history of the site. The Malus-Beauregard House would be a proper location to tell the story of Fazendeville and to present interpretive mention of the architectural style of the house to the river plantations, stressing the connection to General Beauregard as a former owner.
- B. Restoration and furnishing of the house, first and second floors, would add to its charm.
- C. Climate control would further ensure that the house and its furnishings would be preserved for future generations. The house could then be used for social functions.
- D. Reactivating of the Little Colonels, who wore ante-bellum period dresses and served as docents at the house in the past, would further enhance use of the house and be an interesting visitor attraction.

RECOMMENDATIONS THAT ADDRESS CONCERN 5:

- A. The rampart and cannons are the visual reference points that connect the battle to the visitors experience. It would be beneficial to purchase a cannon for every gun emplacement in the ramparts.
- B. Wooden timbers should be replaced in the ramparts.
- C. The height of the ramparts should be increased.
- D. Audio or multi-media stations on the ramparts should be added. More information should include the Naval segments of the campaign. Much of the larger story needs to be interpreted. Some specific points stressed would be the context of the entire campaign in St. Bernard Parish, the effect of the battle on the nation, and why control of the Port of New Orleans was so significant to the nation.
- E. The flag pole should be relocated and refurbished and should fly the 15 star flag.
- F. An interpretation of the flank movements of the British could be available.

RECOMMENDATIONS THAT ADDRESS CONCERN 6:

- A. The Task Force should be a permanent advisory committee consisting of Task Force members whereby regular meetings are scheduled and issues addressed that the Park superintendent is required to attend.
- B. Reevaluate the mission statement of the park addressing not only how the park should be historically interpreted, but also how to promote the importance of the events in an interesting manner, creating an atmosphere whereby visitors want to return
- C. Archeological resources, although not a visible resource, are indeed present and should be interpreted even if only by wayside exhibits.
- D. This advisory committee and/or Task Force should not be disbanded until another advisory committee is authorized or appointed.

RECOMMENDATIONS THAT ADDRESS CONCERN 7:

- A. Incorporated in the permanent advisory committee would be a plan to meet the needs and requests of groups that want to use the park for various activities.
- B. Information of upcoming events should be communicated to volunteers.
- C. ROTC should be apprentices of the living history volunteers so that they can be properly trained in the interpretation techniques regarding this battle.

RECOMMENDATION THAT ADDRESSES CONCERN 8:

- A. Coordinate a cooperative effort transit system with the St. Bernard Urban Rapid Transit (SBURT) and the Regional Transit Authority (RTA) in New Orleans. This would allow a convenient method of transit for visitors to access the National Park in addition to the river boat.

RECOMMENDATIONS THAT ADDRESS CONCERN 9:

- A. Allowing the park to be used before and after park hours would offer recreational opportunities such as cycling, jogging, walking, and bird watching.
- B. The park should be available for special public events.

RECOMMENDATIONS THAT ADDRESS CONCERN 10:

- A. The Chalmette National Battlefield and the Chalmette National Cemetery would have it's own personnel to address the issues of maintaining the facilities.

B. Local concerns unique to the park would be addressed on a regular basis.

RECOMMENDATION THAT ADDRESSES CONCERN 11:

- A. Through a joint effort with local, state, and federal agencies, exhibits and literature concerning Louisiana coastal erosion issues could be available at the joint local and federal visitor center at the Chalmette Battlefield and Chalmette Cemetery site.

RECOMMENDATIONS THAT ADDRESS POTENTIAL SOURCES OF FUNDING

FUNDING OPTIONS FOR CONCERN 1:

Funding for enlarging the visitor center could come from several sources: petition Congress for the funding; establish a non-profit group “Friends of the Chalmette Battlefield”, and apply for grants. A cooperative effort between the Chalmette National Park and local and state government would provide funding opportunity for a visitor center that would promote the parish of St. Bernard, state of Louisiana, and the national park.

FUNDING OPTIONS FOR CONCERN 2:

Petition the National Park Service to allow Chalmette Battlefield and Chalmette Cemetery to have its own maintenance team, allocating funds to accomplish this. Local historical, veterans, civic groups, and garden clubs could be encouraged to participate in the upkeep and maintenance of the park and cemetery.

FUNDING OPTIONS FOR CONCERN 3:

Enhancing the entrance could be funded by applying for grants. Since making the park more attractive would, hopefully, bring in more tourists, request funds from the local parish government

FUNDING OPTIONS FOR CONCERN 4:

Restoring and renovating the Malus-Beauregard House could be achieved by applying for grants. Corporate sponsors could be solicited.

FUNDING OPTION FOR CONCERN 5:

Funding for physical improvements made to the battlefield and cemetery would have to come from the budget and/or Congressional funds.

FUNDING OPTION FOR CONCERN 6:

Recommendation 6 would not require any funding except for providing archeological resources through wayside exhibits. This could possibly be included in the funding for Recommendation 5.

FUNDING OPTION FOR CONCERN 7:

Recommendation 7 would require minimal funding and time.

FUNDING OPTION FOR CONCERN 8:

Funding should be self supporting due to the fares collected from the passengers.

FUNDING OPTIONS FOR CONCERN 9:

Funding would be related to the event. Recreational activities would have no additional impact on the park's intersturcture and requires no additional funding. Special events would have to be self-supporting.

FUNDING OPTIONS FOR CONCERN 10:

The Chalmette National Battlefield and Chalmette National Cemetery would be granted the funds necessary to adequately maintain the sites. These funds would come out of the budget assigned to the Jean Lafitte National Park and Preserve system. Assistance from local interests would be a viable option for additional funding.

FUNDING OPTION FOR CONCERN 11:

Efforts to urge Congress to establish a permanent funding source for coastal restoration projects in Louisiana should be considered in order to protect the future of our national historic treasures and its cultural landscape.

CONCLUSIONS

Creating the Chalmette Battlefield Task Force gave citizens of St. Bernard Parish and the metropolitan area the opportunity to have input into a historic site that is an itrical part of the community. As the Task Force worked on making recommendations to improve the battlefield and cemetery, it was evident that there were many issues to be discussed and solved. The Task Force listed issues it felt were most important, and if resolved, would enrich the lives and opportunities of all citizens.

In 2015, the 200th anniversary of the Battle of New Orleans will be commemorated at the Chalmette Battlefield. History has shown, based on the lack of funding from previous Master Plans for Chalmette, that no significant improvements have been made to one of the most important battle sites in United States history. Therefore, it is the

recommendation of the Task Force to rectify this situation by separating the park and cemetery from the Jean Lafitte National Park and Preserve system. The park and cemetery should stand alone as the Chalmette National Historical Battlefield with its own funding and superintendent.

The Task Force's main objective was to use this process as a launching pad for future improvements. All members of the Task Force felt this was important work that needed to be done.

The Task Force would like to recognize the hard work the Superintendent and her staff have made in preserving the historical character of the park. The combined knowledge of the Facilitator, Superintendent, her staff, and the Southeast Regional Office has made the task of assembling this report a positive learning experience for all.

APPROVAL OF FINAL REPORT

Members of the Chalmette Battlefield Task Force voted to approve the Final Document at its August 18, 2004 meeting.